# Reconciliation

## 8 minutes 37 seconds in length

[Professor David Newhouse sits in front of a bookcase]

>> PROFESSOR DAVID NEWHOUSE: Reconciliation is probably the largest national project that Canada has embarked on since the building of the railways. I mean it's of that huge and immense proportions, right, and it's designed to reset and restart and renew the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and Canada. What happened over the last hundred and so years right is that the relationship, as the Cree would say, has gone awry. Something went wrong and so reconciliation is intended to correct that error. Right, let me give an example at least of how I see reconciliation – why I think it's so important. In 1837, right, the government of Canada, right, in this case this is prior to the establishment Canada so the governors of Upper Canada, right, that passed the Gradual Civilization Act and so what was intended to do was to transform Indians into Europeans, right, and so when Canada became a nation, right, then that project continued and that project continued up until 1971. So for a hundred and fourteen years, right, the Canadian state used its full force – its full power – to try to change Indigenous Peoples right into Europeans and used a whole variety of means do that, right. It created Indian reserves and tried to isolate Indians, it tried to set tests for Indians to become Europeans right to through a process – set up the process of enfranchisement, it created probably one of the most well-known and infamous institutions; the residential school, right, in Canada which became the primary instrument for this transformation process and so for a hundred and fourteen years, right, Indians were subjected to this force of the state and that ended in 1969 when the government tabled in the House of Commons so it's White Paper on Indian Policy. And the White Paper was intended to dissolve The Indian Act, to transfer the responsibilities for Indians from the federal government to provinces, to dissolve Indian reserves, to interpret treaties very narrowly, right. In effect it was a policy of extinguishment or termination, a policy that had been followed and attempted in the United States. There was a great deal of resistance, right, to the tabling of that position paper and the position paper was withdrawn in 1971 and the Canadian government then, right, formally ended its attempt to transform Indians. It didn't quite know what to do and over the next twenty years or so followed a variety of different policies which some would call self-determination – self-government – and it wasn't until 1998, right, with the first Statement of Reconciliation that we began to talk about reconciliation, right. There had been some sort of things before but they weren't labeled reconciliation; they weren't seen within the frame of reconciliation and with the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its report in December 2015 where we have entered into a an official period of reconciliation and most people right don't have a good sense of what that means, right.

Most people now understand that something went wrong. Most people understand and see the consequences on Aboriginal people, Indigenous people, right, Indians, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit of that of what I call the long assault, right. I call that period from 1857 to 1971 the long assault because it really was an assault and so we see the effects of that on the incomes of Indigenous people, on the health of Indigenous people, on the mental health of Indigenous people, right, and so in 19 – 2015, right, we began as a country to say okay now we've got to do something formally about this and Trudeau committed to implementing all of the recommendations of Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

So most Canadians don't know what reconciliation is. I mean its this huge project that doesn't have much definition and so what I've been trying to do is trying to think about what are the components of reconciliation and what I think when I think about reconciliation and try to explain it – I say that it's comprised of four distinct but overlapping elements. The first one is what I call harmony, right, that is focused upon the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, right, so it focuses upon improving that relationship. The second one is what I call equity or what the public policymakers called closing the gap that is improving incomes, improving health, right, improving education, right, improving housing, improving water quality, right, all of those sort of quality of life things, right. The third one is what I call restoration and resurgence and that is a restoration of jurisdiction over Indigenous lands and resources, right, including the water. So it is a way in which one can then begin to develop self-government's role – self-government is also a way in which one begins to focus upon self-determination for self-determination in urban environments. And the last one is what I call a critical conversation about Canada because while we're doing all that, right, then we need also to think about what adjustments we need to make in order to ensure that these things take, right, ensure that Indigenous people are built into the body politic, right, in very significant ways, right, and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples had a vision of Canada, right. They said Canada should consist of the federal – the federal government, right, of provinces, of territories and of Aboriginal nations, right. And so we should have a third level of government, right, that would comprise Aboriginal governments and so there's a conversation, right, that needs to occur about how Canada is structured and how Canada's governed and what place Aboriginal people play within it. So it's a way of trying to talk about reconciliation so that people can find a place to work within it.

The other part of reconciliation that most people don't I think about is the length of time, right. This is the work of generations. It has taken us a hundred and fourteen years to get here, which is about seven generations or so. Murray Sinclair says it's going to take seven generations to get out of it so it is a long-term process, right. It's going to take, right, at least okay another hundred years or so and people also think that there ought to be an endpoint. Well there isn't an end point, right. It's going to be a constant conversation. I mean that's the nature of Canada. Our relationships have changed, right, we have to begin to rejuggle things based upon our new understandings, right, and so as we move forward in the process of reconciliation, we're always going to be thinking about what more can be done, right, and sometimes they can be large things, sometimes going to be small things, but there's always going to be more to be done.