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Development Heads North

Chapter Outline

Development in Canada's North took place at a slower pace than in the rest of the country. This was partly because the area was not considered suitable for settlement. However, that did not mean zero involvement in the North. For example, with the greater ease of transportation after the development of railway, the appearance of trappers and prospectors began to grow in the north. In the western arctic, the whaling industry also brought hundreds of newcomers. At first, the impact on the Inuit was not significant and there were benefits to the trade that took place with the trappers and whalers. However, as the natural resources became over-exploited, the Inuit suffered destruction to their way of life. One of the ways the government responded to this situation was to implement Inuit relocations. At first, these were coordinated with the fur trade; however, the selections were made by the government and typically resulted in failure, with the Inuit suffering starvation, disease and death in the process of being shuttled back and forth.

A government presence was established with the arrival of the RCMP in 1895, and that same year, the Yukon was organized into a district, and later into territories. However, the government refused to sign treaties until the Klondike Gold Rush first brought large numbers of whites to the North, which caused Indigenous Peoples to take action and refuse passage to anyone through their territory. In negotiating Treaty Eight, Indigenous Peoples' greatest concern was the protection of their hunting and fishing rights. The government's position on the treaty was that it had extinguished Aboriginal title and could regulate other rights considered to be 'usufructuary.' However, Indigenous Peoples disagreed with the idea of transferring land ownership or any infringement on their rights to hunt and trap. To clear railway right of way in northern Ontario, Treaty Nine was finally agreed to in 1905, and to clear land title for the province of Saskatchewan, Treaty Ten was agreed to in 1906. And, like Treaty Eight, First Nations and Métis agreed to sign Treaty Eleven in 1921, only after being assured of their freedom to hunt, trap and fish.

The relative isolation of the Inuit was most greatly affected by the completion of the Alaska highway in 1945. However, the Inuit were mostly allowed to live as they had in the past until the issue of jurisdiction between the federal government and the provinces came to the forefront in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Quebec took the federal government to court to determine who was responsible both administratively and financially for the Inuit. In 1939, the Supreme Court of Canada determined that the Inuit were a federal responsibility. This decision would have lasting effects.

After the close of World War II, the strategic importance of the Arctic, especially the role of the weather stations and the Distance Early Warning system radar line, caused the government to re-evaluate the land and its people. As a strategy to try to demonstrate Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic, the decision was made to relocate a number of Quebec Inuit to the High Arctic where game re-

sources were untouched. The game resources were not what the Inuit were used to and as they saw it, they were subjects of a social and political experiment that was destined to fail.

The 1990s saw the creation of a third Canadian territory called Nunavut. The creation of this territory was the result of the Nunavut Land Claim Settlement and provides the Inuit with a form of self-government and fee simple title to lands. There were challenges such as the training of lawyers and administrators as well as housing shortages, poverty, unemployment, and high rates of suicide. However, it now appears that the Nunavut Economic Development Strategy is bringing greater benefits. The plan has been updated and there are now several new partnerships involved; several visits by several luxury cruise ships passing through the Northwest Passage has also created thousands of dollars in business for Indigenous artists throughout Nunavut and surrounding territories.

Learning Objectives

- To understand how northern Canada developed at a much slower pace than did southern Canada
- To recognize the importance of the North for the Inuit and the Inuit for the North
- To understand the short and long-term implications of the relocation of Inuit families in the 1950s
- To understand how and why a new Inuit territory called Nunavut was negotiated

Key Terms, Figures or Sites

Aglukark, Susan Juno award winning Inuk musician who has used her fame to promote a number of humanitarian concerns, serving as special advisor to the Collateral Damage project, a mental health organization; chair of Arctic Children and Youth Foundation; and, chair of Arctic Rose fund, an effort to establish food banks across Canada (p. 293).

Alaska Highway A 1,520-mile (2,446 km) road built in 1942 from Dawson Creek, BC, to Fairbanks, Alaska, as a supply route for the Second World War (p. 290).

DEW Line (Distant Early Warning) Line Series of radar installations built above the Arctic Circle and extending from Alaska across northern Canada to Greenland that began operation in 1954. It was meant to serve as a warning system for over-the-pole attacks on North America by nuclear-armed bombers from the Soviet Union (p. 293).

Klondike Gold Rush Massive influx of southerners into the Klondike area, Yukon, following news of the discovery of gold that led to the negotiation of Treaty Eight (p. 286).

Northwest Passage Hoped-for and sought-after shortcut from northern Europe to China, which was the reason for the voyages of John Cabot and other early European explorers (p. 283).

Nunavut Land Claim Settlement (1993) Legislation that paved the way for the creation of the self-governing territory of Nunavut and the largest land claim settlement in Canadian history (p. 296).

relocation As a policy of the Canadian federal government, it meant moving First Nations or Inuit communities to new locations (p. 293).

Usufructuary right The legal right to use something, such as land, without ownership (p. 287).

Study Questions

1. Why did the Northwest Territories Council have to finally restrict trapping licenses to territory residents in 1938?
2. What were the main reasons behind the establishment of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in the North?
3. What were the short term and longer-term impacts of the whaling industry on the Inuit of the Arctic?
4. What set off the Klondike Gold Rush and what was the role of Indigenous people in this event?
5. How did the influx of gold-seekers affect Indigenous Peoples?
6. Why was Treaty Eight signed and what were the key terms of this Treaty?
7. What is a usufructuary right?
8. Why were Treaties Nine, Ten, and Eleven signed and what were the key terms of these Treaties?
9. What precipitated the jurisdictional debate between the federal and Quebec governments regarding the Inuit and what was the result for the Inuit?
10. What is the DEW line?
11. Why did Canada decide to enact a policy of Inuit relocation?
12. What were the short- and long-term impacts of the Inuit relocation program?
13. What precipitated the creation of Nunavut?

Essay Questions

1. Explain the two different points of view held by missionaries and the government with regards to Inuit and non-Aboriginal relations.

The missionaries believed that liquor was causing much harm to the Aboriginal communities of the far north. They were concerned for their well-being and that their society was disintegrating. At the request of the missionaries, the government sent the North West Mounted Police

(NWMP) as their representative to deal with the situation. However, although the NWMP agreed that the free flow of liquor was a problem, they felt that the missionaries were more concerned with the needs of the Indigenous people than of non-Indigenous people. In the end, the missionaries' concerns were realized and disease and lifestyle disruption ended with the extinction of many of the original peoples in various locations throughout the north (pp. 284-286).

2. Describe how and when the first permanent official presence was established in the Arctic.

In 1903, the Canadian government sent the NWMP to establish posts at Herschel Island and Fort McPherson in the western Arctic. In the eastern part of the country, a regular official presence known as the Eastern Arctic Patrol was not established until 1922. From an administrative point of view, the Inuit were treated as though they were First Nations even though they were not included in the Indian Act, and the federal government refused to accept responsibility for them at first. It was not until 1924 that the Indian Act was amended to include the Inuit (however, they were excluded when the Act was amended in 1951) (pp. 290-292).

3. Who is Susan Aglukark and why is she important?

The first Inuk musician to gain international recognition for her music was Susan Aglukark (b. 1967). She has been acclaimed through multiple awards including Junos, the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal, and acceptance as a member of the Order of Canada. Her music has served to raise awareness of Indigenous issues on a global level. Her humanist approach to music is paralleled by her work as an advocate for children and youth through many foundations and youth initiatives (p. 293).

Additional Resources

Further Readings

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Qikiqtani Inuit Association – “Nuutaniq: Moves in Inuit Life”

- https://www.qtcommission.ca/sites/default/files/public/thematic_reports/thematic_reports_english_nuutauniq.pdf

The Canadian Encyclopedia – Nunavut

- <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/nunavut/>

Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada – National Voice of Inuit Women

- <https://pauktuutit.ca/>