

RE-READING THE HISTORY OF MUNICIPAL RECREATION IN CANADA

A SUMMARY OF
Fit to be Canadian? The Recreation Industrial Complex in Canada



*Image of a pair of old 1950s style
skates leaning against a hockey net.*

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Image of (white) elementary school aged children playing on two playground slides. City of Thunder Bay Archives

OVERVIEW

Canada is a settler colonial nation. Defined by the permanent settlement of Europeans (and other immigrants) on Indigenous territories, settler colonialism must be thought of as a series of ongoing structures, rather than an event that occurred in the past [1].

The towns, cities, industries, and institutions that have come to define Canadian society were established through historical forms of Indigenous elimination. Furthermore, the maintenance of these towns, cities, industries, and institutions continue to perpetuate the exploitation of their traditional territories. In other words, settler colonialism has never stopped.

Recognizing that public recreation is one of the many institutions that has been built and sustained through the processes of settler colonialism, the information in this document is intended to assist recreation professionals as they work to develop more equitable and meaningful leisure opportunities. By providing a snapshot of Canadian history, the document outlines some of the logics that were prevalent during the development of our earliest public recreation sites.

LAYOUT

This document has been divided into four sections. The first three provide an overview of particular eras in history. More specifically, they outline key historical moments and introduce some of the objectives of, and threats to, the Canadian state. Within each of these sections, some examples of the policies and practices used to achieve the stated objectives are also provided. Each section concludes with a discussion of the ways that municipal recreation reinforced many of these seemingly unrelated policies and practices.

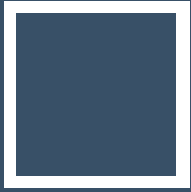
The fourth section of the document attempts to answer the question, *What do we do with this information in the present?* and in doing so demonstrates how a critical examination of the past can be used in the fight for more equitable, diverse, and meaningful leisure opportunities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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MID 1700s - EARLY 1880s

KEY HISTORICAL MOMENTS

In 1763, France surrendered the Indigenous territories now known as Canada to Britain, ending the Seven Years War. That same year, King George III issued the *Royal Proclamation of 1763*. This proclamation established the basis for governing these Indigenous territories according to British rule. [2, 3]

The legal foundation for the ongoing occupation of Indigenous territories was rooted in the 15th century concept of *terra nullius*. A Latin term meaning “nobody’s land,” *terra nullius* legitimized the fiction that particular continents had no ‘human’ inhabitants before Europeans arrived. [3] Territories that had not been cultivated based on European standards and had only Indigenous (or non-European) inhabitants were legally regarded by European nations as ‘empty’ or ‘uninhabited.’ It was, therefore, through the concept of *terra nullis* that the ‘legal titles’ to Indigenous territories were claimed. [3]

GUIDING OBJECTIVES

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the primary objective for the British Crown was territorial acquisition. British settlers pursued a diverse range of tactics in order to ensure European settlement. This included the formation of a British state, the development of a capitalist market, and the promotion of Christian values. [1, 4]

THREATS TO EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT

Indigenous peoples: The British (and to a lesser degree the French) were interested in establishing a new settler society. Indigenous peoples – that is, their sovereignty and rights to the land – threatened this goal. Thus, the elimination of Indigenous peoples became an organizing principle of the colonial state. [4, 5]

Economically unproductive emigrants and immigrants: There were concerns about the economic cost of ‘diseased,’ ‘destitute,’ and ‘dependent’ individuals arriving in the North American colonies. [6] As a result, a number of measures were used to prevent the entry of those incapable of ‘productive labour.’ [7] This included individuals too weak or sick to work, anyone over sixty, unwed mothers, orphans and those categorized as mentally or physically disabled. [8,9] It is worth noting that during this time, race was not yet a formalized determining factor for entry in the North American British colonies. Despite the existence of racist discourses and practices (primarily targeting Black and Chinese individuals), anyone who was considered economically useful was granted entry. In other words, anyone capable of contributing to the growth of a new British society was permitted to live and work in Canada. [7]

EXAMPLES OF POLICIES AND PROGRAMS INTENDED TO MITIGATE THREATS

- **1749 Scalping Proclamation:** A legal decree that gave the government of Nova Scotia the ability to issue financial rewards for the scalps and bodies of Indigenous people. [5]
- **18th and early 19th century smallpox-induced genocide:** British forces distributed blankets that were deliberately infected with smallpox in an attempt to promote the spread of the disease. [5]
- **1795 - 1838 Quarantine Acts of Lower Canada, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick:** These Acts were meant to ensure the health of passengers arriving at Lower Canada, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. They legally required ships to wait offshore for medical clearance. [10]
- **1803, 1828 Passenger Vessel Acts:** The purpose of these Acts was to address overcrowding on ships by restricting the number of passengers. [10] The ultimate goal was to reduce the number of diseased emigrants coming from Britain in order to preserve the health of the Europeans who had already settled in the North American British Colonies.
- **1830 Indian Civilization Program:** Shifting from physical eradication to cultural eradication, this program sought the creation of “civilized” (read Christian) Indigenous communities. [11]
- **1847 emigration numbers were the largest the colonies had seen:** The majority of these emigrants were seeking refuge from the poverty caused by the great potato famine in Ireland. Of the more than 95,000 emigrants that had reached British North America in 1847, approximately six-sevenths were Irish. [6]

- **1848 Act to Make Better Provision with Respect to Emigrants:** The purpose of this Act was to prevent the entry of individuals unable to work. It imposed the first explicit medical examinations and required ships' masters to put up a bond for the passage of anyone "likely to become permanently a public charge." [12] The monies in the bond were intended to cover the costs incurred for the care of any passenger over a one-year period.
- **1869 Gradual Enfranchisement Act:** This Act made it illegal for "Status Indians" (i.e., those Indigenous people refusing to become British subjects) to own their own land. It also forced all Indigenous nations to adopt a European-style electoral system, granted the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs the power to determine who was eligible for band and treaty benefits, and eliminated the status rights of Indigenous women who married non-Indigenous men. [13]
- **1869 Act Respecting Immigration and Immigrants:** This Act focused on ensuring the health and productivity of immigrants. Entry was given almost entirely to individuals who could demonstrate a level of economic security, and ultimately contribute to Prime Minister John A. Macdonald's desire to cement colonial land claims in the West. [7]
- **1876 Indian Act:** This Act consolidated all Indigenous legislation in to one legal document. 'Status Indians' were deemed wards of the state (meaning they weren't legal citizens). Their cultures were erased and their day-to-day activities were managed and controlled by over 100 pages of legislation. [5]
- **1881 An Act to Amend the Indian Act:** This amendment prohibited the sale of any "grain or root crops, or other produce grown upon any Indian Reserve," except in accordance with government regulations. As a result of the amendment, Indigenous farmers were required to have a permit to sell grain and produce off the reserve. Additionally, settlers were prohibited from purchasing goods directly from reserves. Thus, it was through this amendment that the Canadian government sought to protect "the market share" for Europeans who were threatened by the unexpected success of some Indigenous farmers. [15]
- **Between 1881 and 1884 over 17,000 Chinese immigrants aided in the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway:** Their labour was inexpensive compared to the labour of European settlers and was essential to the completion of the railway. They were employed to build the most dangerous sections of the railway, resulting in incredibly high rates of injury and death. [82] In other words, their economic and colonial utility outweighed the European notions of racial degeneracy that were directed toward the Chinese.

HOW DID MUNICIPAL RECREATION CONTRIBUTE TO SETTLER COLONIALISM IN THE EARLY 1800s?

URBAN PARKS

Prior the 1880s, publicly funded municipal recreation facilities – that is, government-funded swimming pools, skating rinks, and gymnasiums – were non-existent. It wasn't until the mid 1800s, when urbanization became a political issue that municipal recreation facilities were introduced. Prior to the mid 1800s, the federal government did, however, give control of particular pieces of Indigenous lands to local governments for the purposes of park development. Examples of these parks include Stanley Park, Mount Royal Park, Toronto Island Park, Point Pleasant Park. [16]

Designed explicitly for "activities that mirrored *Victorian* domesticity" [17], these urban parks were intended to provide 'healthy' recreational opportunities for the colony's labouring classes. Despite this goal, however, Canada's earliest urban parks were located outside the 'city proper' – far from the city's working class, immigrant and black neighbourhoods – and could only be reached by carriage. Thus, it was primarily middle and upper class British settlers who frequented these recreational sites. [16]

In addition to only serving the recreation needs of middle and upper class settlers, the 19th century park movement also increased the wealth and security of this same group of settlers. When parks were developed, the privately owned properties that sat adjacent to these 'public' lands increased in value [17, 18]. It was, therefore, through this strategic re-purposing of Indigenous lands that middle and upper class British settlers were able to provide for their recreational needs, while also increasing their private capital.

KEY TAKE AWAY

When read this way, Canada's earliest urban parks can no longer be positioned as equitable instruments of public good. Instead, they must be read as part of the larger settler colonial project that sought to erect a new British society on expropriated Indigenous territory, and in doing so helped to secure an unequal distribution of health, wealth, and security among those living within this new society.



MID 1880s - EARLY 1930s

KEY HISTORICAL MOMENTS

In 1883, Sir Francis Galton officially defined eugenics as the “study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, either physically or mentally.” [19]

Eugenics provided legislators with the 'scientific' rationale necessary for the introduction of a comprehensive network of policies and programs intended to ensure the “survival of the fittest” while simultaneously attempting to “eliminate the unfit.” [20]

GUIDING OBJECTIVES

In the mid 1880s, Indigenous sovereignty was still considered a threat to Canadian sovereignty. However, by the early 1880s only a few hundred Indigenous people were living off reserve. [21] As a result, the Canadian state was no longer simply interested in the acquisition of Indigenous lands. Fearing the 'fitness' of the Canadian nation was now at risk, the Canadian state began to use the logics of eugenics to ensure the 'biological purity' of the national community. Combining racist research in the areas of biology, anthropology, demography, and genetics, supporters of eugenics provided legislators with the 'scientific' rationale required to develop and implement policies and programs that were intended to achieve three very specific goals:

1. Secure the "Aryan character" of the national community.
2. Eliminate all 'degenerates' from the national community.
3. Maintain a 'healthy' national community in order to grow the cities and industries imagined in this white, capitalist, settler colonial society. [7]

THREATS TO THE GROWTH OF A WHITE, CAPITALIST, SETTLER COLONIAL SOCIETY

Anyone categorized as a 'Degenerate' Other: The category of 'degenerate' Other included all members of the 'non-preferred' races (i.e., all non-white races) as well as anyone else who was considered to be economically, morally, or physically degenerate (e.g., 'the pauper,' 'the criminal,' 'the crippled,' 'the feeble-minded,' 'the drunkard,' 'the homosexual'). Individuals situated within this category were positioned as threats to the 'biological purity' of the Canadian nation. As a result, they remained cut off from the national community through a variety of immigration, health, education, and other reform policies and practices that explicitly eliminated, excluded, segregated, or institutionalized them. [7]

The 'acceptable' working-class: This group included working-class individuals from Britain and France, as well as other Western European nations such as Ireland, Finland, and Sweden. Members of this group were considered white enough and healthy enough to contribute to the growth of Canadian cities, towns, institutions and industries. [7] In order to remain 'acceptable', however, these individuals needed to continue to be economically productive, while also being politically and morally aligned with the ruling British class. [7] In other words, their inclusion in the national community, and the security that came with it, was directly reliant on their ability to avoid being positioned as an economic, social, moral, or political threat. Often, this required that they participate in educational and environmental interventions intended to improve their 'health' and 'fitness.'

EXAMPLES OF POLICIES AND PROGRAMS INTENDED TO MITIGATE THREATS

- **By the mid 1880s Ontario and Nova Scotia had segregated schools:** A number of laws were developed to ensure Black and White students either attended different schools or were present at different times. These segregated practices were rooted in a fear that white children would "suffer from the effects of bad example" if they were in school alongside Black children. [22]
- **In 1883 the first Government run residential school opened in Battleford, Saskatchewan:** Operating from 1883 until 1996, residential schools were federally funded sites where thousands of Indigenous children and youth died from abuse, starvation, and treatable illnesses. [23]
- **1884 Pass System:** The pass system was a federal policy that kept Indigenous peoples confined to reserves by requiring them to obtain a pass from a federal Indian Agent in order to leave and return. The pass system was enforced in various degrees until the late 1940s. [24]
- **1884 The Indian Act is amended banning the Potlatch:** This legislated form of cultural erasure made it illegal to practice the potlatch. The potlatch is an Indigenous ceremony where families would gather to celebrate births, marriages, or to mourn the loss of a loved one. [23]

- **1885 Electoral Franchise Act:** This Act explicitly disenfranchised women, Indigenous peoples, and people of Chinese heritage. It also required people to earn a certain annual income and own or rent a house of specific value to be able to vote. As a result, a number of Black migrants, French settlers, and Irish immigrants were indirectly disenfranchised. This version of the Act was repealed in 1898, but women still didn't get the vote until 1919; racialized exclusions were only removed in 1948 (with the exception of Indigenous people who couldn't vote until 1960); and property based qualifications for voting were only removed in 1948. [25]
- **1885 Chinese Immigration Act:** This piece of legislation introduced a head tax of \$50 (the equivalent of \$1,437 today) in an attempt to reduce the number of Chinese immigrants coming to Canada. The logic behind this act was that Chinese individuals were not 'evolved' enough to achieve the intellectual and moral expectation of superior, white civilizations. [26]
- **1890 Criminal Code:** One section of the code stated male homosexuality was illegal. It remained illegal until 1969. [27]
- **1894 The Indian Act is amended making school attendance compulsory for Indigenous children:** All Indigenous children between the ages of seven and sixteen were required to attend government run schools. Indian Agents were authorized to appoint truant officers who had the ability to fine and arrest parents who did not comply with these regulations. Parents who kept their children out of school were denied food and other state assistance. Furthermore, no Indigenous child could be discharged from a residential school without departmental approval. [23]
- **1906 Immigration Act:** This Act allowed for the exclusion of any person convicted of "crimes involving moral turpitude." [28] Moral turpitude was understood as any act that violated the Christian standard of the British society. Individuals could, therefore, be denied entry simply because of their culture or religion.
- **1908 Continuous Journey Passage:** This amendment to the 1906 Immigration Act was a response to the increasing number of immigrants arriving from India and Japan. It prohibited the entry of immigrants unable to arrive from their point of origin uninterrupted. [29] In 1907, there were approximately 2,500 immigrants from South Asia. In 1909, this number was reduced to six. [30]
- **1910 Immigration Act:** This version of the Immigration Act prohibited the landing of "immigrants belonging to any race deemed unsuited to the climate or requirements of Canada." [31] In other words, it restricted immigration from warmer (non-white) countries in Africa, South Asia, and Southern Europe.
- **1914 Act Respecting British Nationality, Naturalization and Aliens:** Between 1914 and 1947, naturalization (i.e., becoming a Canadian resident) was a process primarily reserved for 'healthy' men and unmarried women of European descent. As outlined by the Act, it was only those non-British subjects who were deemed to have good "moral character" and also have an "adequate knowledge of either French or English" that were eligible for naturalization. Anyone who did not meet these criteria or was deemed to be "under disability" (i.e, married women, minors, or anyone with physical or mental disabilities) were ineligible for naturalization. [32] Furthermore, Indigenous peoples could not simultaneously be classified as British subjects and Status Indians. Therefore, in order for Indigenous people to become British subjects they had to relinquish their Indigenous status and any treaty rights afforded to them. [32]
- **1917 War-time Elections Act:** This Act reinforced anti-immigrant discourses by disenfranchising "enemy aliens" from Germany, Ukraine, and Poland. [34] It also gave the vote to female relatives of Canadian soldiers. It is worth noting that only white men were allowed to join the air force until 1943 and the navy until 1944. [34]
- **1919 Act to Amend the Immigration Act:** As a result of this amendment, anyone deemed "undesirable" because of "customs, habits or modes of life" was prohibited from immigrating to Canada. [35] In other words, anyone who threatened the purity of the population due to a lack of whiteness, Christianity or capitalist lifestyle could be deemed "undesirable" and denied entry. This version of the Act remained relatively unchanged until 1976. [4]
- **In the 1920s it was common for racialized groups to be denied the opportunity to rent or buy property:** For example, from 1928 - 1965, Vancouver real estate deeds stated, "the Grantee or his heirs, administrators, executor, successors or assigns will not sell to, agree to sell to, rent to, lease to, or permit or allow to occupy, the said lands and premises or any part thereof, to any person of Chinese, Japanese or other Asiatic race or to any Indian or Negro." [36]
- **1922 Empire Settlement Act:** This Act introduced a variety of settlement incentives intended to facilitate the immigration of British subjects. Transportation fares, agricultural training, and financing for land were made available to try to increase the number of British subjects settling in Western Canada. [37]
- **1923 Chinese Exclusion Act:** This piece of legislation restricted virtually all immigration from China between 1923 and 1947. It is estimated that between 1923 and 1946, only 15 Chinese immigrants were granted entry into Canada. [38]
- **1925 The Indian Act is amended outlawing all Indigenous dancing:** This specific amendment was part of the larger project intended to absorb Indigenous peoples into the colonial regime by erasing their entire culture. [23]

HOW DID MUNICIPAL RECREATION CONTRIBUTE TO THE GROWTH OF A WHITE, CAPITALIST, SETTLER SOCIETY?

From the mid 1800s until the late 1920s, social reformers (read eugenicists) campaigned for, and developed, a number of educational and environmental reforms. The primary purpose of these reforms was to make the white, working class more fit for labour and less dangerous to the middle and upper classes. In a recreation context, two of these reforms were supervised playgrounds and swimming pools.

SUPERVISED PLAYGROUNDS

Supervised playgrounds were an essential element of eugenic reform. Described as “laboratories where the habits of health and social custom could be taught in a play atmosphere” [16], supervised playgrounds were intended to eliminate a number of pathologies (e.g., drunkenness, criminality) in working class children, while simultaneously instilling in them a British patriotism.

The social reformers who campaigned for and ran supervised playgrounds did so using a philosophy of childhood prevention. They believed that if they could intervene in the lives of white, working-class children, they would be able to eradicate many of the moral, social, and physical ‘disorders’ associated with poverty and “eventually dispense with the curfew, the juvenile court, the jail and the reform school.” [39] Thus, between 1904 and 1928, the majority of Canada’s urban centres developed and operated supervised playgrounds as a reformatory measure. [16]

The focus on white, working-class children is important to note. By the time the playground movement started, almost all Indigenous peoples were living on reserves or in residential schools. [21] Additionally, due to the use of racist immigration policies, the majority of immigrants during this time were from Western Europe (for example, in 1911 97% of people living in Canada were of Western European Descent [40]). Therefore, despite the suggestion that our earliest playgrounds were sites for ALL ‘vulnerable’ or ‘at-risk’ children, it was primarily lower class, white children that were the targets of the playground movement.

The racial make-up of our settler colonial towns and cities was not the only reason racialized children were absent from our earliest playgrounds. Racist tropes such as the ‘savage Indian’ and ‘blackface minstrels’ were also common during playground games and performances. [41] Such characters not only normalized racist attitudes, they also constructed a white Canadian identity that was opposed to the non-white Other. It can, therefore, be assumed that even in the absence of explicit racialized exclusions, non-white children would be hesitant to attend programming that suggested they were inferior or degenerate Others.

SWIMMING POOLS

Public baths can be read as the nation’s first indoor swimming pools. Primarily located in the larger, older, and wealthier urban centres of Ontario and Quebec, these public facilities have been celebrated by contemporary historians for improving both the personal hygiene and the physical fitness of the lower classes. [42] However, not all members of the lower classes were able to access these so-called ‘public’ baths. In order to “prevent abuse of the privilege” and “provide a revenue” [44], Canada’s earliest swimming pools adopted a pay-to-play business model and charged the public (a similar amount to what municipal pools charge today) for the use of the facilities. [44, 45]

It is for this reason that the so-called inclusive nature of these ‘public’ baths must be questioned. While they were indeed designed to contribute to the broader goal of public health, their ‘pay-to-play’ model made access possible for some members of the lower classes, but impossible for others. More specifically, it was only those lower-class individuals who were economically independent and had the disposable income to pay for the use of the baths (i.e., the ‘acceptable’ working class) who were able to use these publicly funded facilities. Individuals who lacked this economic independence and could not afford to pay for the use of the baths (i.e., ‘degenerate’ Others) were denied access.

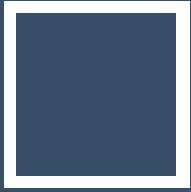
The outdoor swimming pools that became popular after World War I adopted a similar market-based model. As demonstrated by Toronto’s Sunnyside Pool, the cost of a single admission was 35 cents for an adult and 10 cents for a child. [46] These amounts, which do not seem prohibitive in a contemporary context, equate to \$5.19 for an adult and \$1.50 for a child. Thus, as is the case today, the only individuals who had access to these ‘public’ facilities were those who were capable of voluntarily paying for the use.

Cost was not the only exclusionary factor at play when it came to public baths and swimming pools. During the first part of the 20th century, racialized exclusions were also present in these ‘public’ facilities. Based on the racist notion that racialized people (especially Black people) were carriers of diseases, the (white) middle and upper classes sought to minimize “contact with ‘lesser’ races” in a number of public spaces, including swimming pools. [47, 48]

A clear example of how white Canadians attempted to avoid interracial contact in ‘public’ swimming pools can be found in a 1923 Edmonton bylaw. Banning all Black people from parks and swimming pools, this bylaw was a response to two Black citizens entering Oliver Pool, prompting all white bathers to leave. [49] The bylaw was quickly overturned due to fierce opposition from Edmonton’s Black community. However, up until the 1960s, there were complaints about racialized individuals using pools across Canada. [51] As a result, many swimming pools introduced white-only areas and white-only schedules. [51]

KEY TAKE AWAY

When read this way, neither playgrounds nor swimming pools can be separated from the overarching structure of settler colonial capitalism. As demonstrated above, both of these ‘public’ recreation facilities reinforced a number of racist, ableist, and classed discourses and practices in an attempt to facilitate the production of a ‘biologically fit’ and ‘economically productive’ white working class. Thus, these ‘public’ recreation facilities must be read as sites that reinforced the racialized and classed hierarchy. Like most other systems developed by European settlers (e.g., the education system, the legal system) they sought to secure (although unequally) the health, wealth, and security of ‘biologically fit’ and ‘economically productive’ settlers in order to ensure the growth of a white, market-based, settler colonial society.



MID 1930s - MID 1970s

KEY HISTORICAL MOMENTS

The devastation caused by the Great Depression and World War II forced senior levels of government to introduce a number of new social welfare programs. [53] The programs were intended to address a number of concerns due to the failures of capitalism (e.g., poverty, unemployment, social unrest). The overall goal was to ensure a level of 'collective' or 'universal' security. [54]

GUIDING OBJECTIVES

Despite often being described as 'universal,' the welfare programs introduced during this time were neither equitable nor inclusive. A major reason for this was that the Canadian state never seriously pursued a *social democratic* objective. Opting instead for a *social liberal* regime that aimed to "contain the dangers posed by the worst-off and reinforce the security and individual freedoms of the better off," Canada's welfare state aimed to address social and health inequalities through a number of supports with a predetermined set of racist, classed, and heterosexist eligibility criteria). [55] In other words, rather than redistributing resources in a way that would reduce the gap between the highest and lowest income groups, Canada's welfare state reinforced exclusion and marginalization in the name of a gendered, racialized, market-based freedom.

THREATS TO THIS GENDERED, RACIALIZED, MARKET-BASED FREEDOM

Anyone who denounced capitalism: Those who challenged the market-based ethos of settler colonial capitalism were deemed a threat to liberty, freedom, and democracy. [53] In reality, however, they were only a threat to the ruling elites who benefited the most from capitalism (i.e., those who owned property and controlled resource extraction and production). During this time, the biggest threats to capitalism included Indigenous peoples (due to their continued fight for sovereignty and a desire to protect the environment), communists (due to their desire to ensure the state, not the market, became the country's dominant institution) and socialists or social democrats (due to their desire for increased regulation, more equitable taxation, and state funded social programs). A number of strategies were developed to surveil, detain, and imprison these threats.

Anyone who did not conform to the roles of the 'traditional' family: The traditional family was 'scientifically' defined as a hetero-patriarchal unit of two adults and their healthy children. [56] The primary role for the adult male was to be the 'breadwinner' of his family. The primary role for the adult female (even if she had a job) was housekeeping and the care of the children. Families that did not fit this definition were deemed 'abnormal' and thus, not worthy of the same state supports as the traditional family.

EXAMPLES OF POLICIES AND PROGRAMS INTENDED TO MITIGATE THREATS

- **During the 1930s residential schools were at their peak:** These schools continued to harm thousands of Indigenous children and youth until 1996. [23]
- **Immigration policies of the early 1900s remained relatively unchanged until 1976:** It was still the case that anyone deemed "undesirable" because of "customs, habits or modes of life" was prohibited from immigrating to Canada. In other words, anyone who threatened the purity of the population due to a lack of whiteness, Christianity or capitalist lifestyle was still deemed "undesirable" and denied entry. [4, 7]
- **The modified pass system was enforced until the late 1940s:** This federal policy required Indigenous people to obtain a pass from Federal Indian Agents to leave and return to reserves. [23]
- **1932 Cooperative Commonwealth Federation is founded:** The CCF was a political coalition of farmers and labourers that wanted economic reform related to anti-monopoly action. The members of the CCF were guided by the values of Christianity and democratic socialism. Suggesting that the right to a quality life should not be reserved for the wealthy, the primary objective of the CCF was to reduce the inequalities experienced by farmers, labourers, and small businessmen. [57, 58] As such, their policy platform was composed of a number of social security programs, including minimum wage, workers' compensation, universal public pensions, universal health care, children's allowances, unemployment insurance, farm security, and public ownership of key industries. [59]

- **1939 War Measures Act:** This Act gave the federal government the power to censor 325 newspapers and ban more than 30 religious, cultural and political organizations (e.g., Jehovah's Witnesses, Communist Party of Canada). Free speech was also restricted and anyone critical of government or businesses could be interned without trial. Groups that were targeted included Italians, Germans, Japanese, Jewish individuals, Communists, Mennonites, and anyone who sympathized with any of these groups. Many Japanese Canadians were also stripped of their property and deported. Under this Act, the federal government also appropriated Stony Point Reserve lands and forced all members of the Stony Point First Nation to relocate to Kettle Point Reserve. The lands were used as a military training camp from 1942 until 1995. [60]

- **1940 Unemployment Insurance Act:** This Act was intended to provide financial assistance to unemployed persons. However, those who were ill, injured, pregnant, too old to work, were fired, left their job with 'just cause', refused any type of employment (regardless of the conditions), participated in strikes or work stoppages, or weren't previously employed full-time were all ineligible for support. In other words, in addition to denying assistance to people who were sick, old, or pregnant, this so-called 'universal' welfare program also excluded most women and racialized people because they were often denied full-time employment opportunities. It also excluded gay people who were 'fired' because of their 'illegal' sexuality, and anyone who publicly supported unions. This Act remained largely unchanged until 1971. [55]

- **1944 Family Allowances Act:** This act was intended to increase the purchasing power of families by providing mothers with a monthly allowance for every child under 16. By tying assistance directly to a woman's role as a mother, the family allowance not only reinforced the notion that women were naturally and necessarily mothers, it also further secured a monopoly for men in the workforce. Therefore, just as unemployment insurance privileged the "white male-breadwinner" [55], the Family Allowances Act (which remained relatively unchanged until 1978) was also reinforced (hetero)patriarchal family norm. [55]

- **1944 Family Allowances Act (for Indigenous Mothers):** The Department of Indian Affairs did not trust Indigenous families to "properly" utilize funds. [61] Therefore, despite being the first major benefit program to actually include Indigenous peoples, the Department of Indian Affairs placed tighter controls on their support. Indigenous mothers could not collect cash, like all other Canadians were entitled to do. Instead, they would receive certain items of clothing or particular items of food. [61] The differential treatment experienced by Indigenous peoples was even more pronounced by the fact that family allowance payments were conditional on the child's attendance at school. Recognizing that this was the case for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, residential school was still mandatory for Indigenous children during the 1940s. Thus, in order to access these supports Indigenous peoples had to surrender the legal custody of their children by sending them to schools that have since been described as "internment camps for Indian children." [62]

- **1946 Canadian Citizenship Act:** This piece of legislation gave legal status to the term "Canadian" by detailing who was, and who could become, a Canadian citizen. As outlined by the Act, all British subjects living in Canada prior to 1947 were automatically granted citizenship. After 1947, the only subjects to be automatically granted citizenship were those categorized as "natural born." This included anyone born in Canada (with the exception of Indigenous people, who were denied citizenship until 1956) or anyone born to a Canadian father outside of Canada (another example of the state's (hetero)patriarchal practices). Immigrants could apply for citizenship five years after having been "lawfully admitted to Canada for permanent residence." [63] However, as was the case with naturalization, in order to be granted citizenship, immigrants were required to be "of good character" and have "an adequate knowledge of either French or English." [63] Therefore, between 1914 and 1976, what constituted a "desirable" immigrant (i.e., individuals of Western European descent) and what constituted an "undesirable" immigrant (i.e., racialized individuals from non-Christian countries) remained relatively unchanged.

- **Racialized groups were often denied the opportunity to rent or buy property:** Until 1965, Vancouver real estate deeds stated, "the Grantee or his heirs, administrators, executor, successors or assigns will not sell to, agree to sell to, rent to, lease to, or permit or allow to occupy, the said lands and premises or any part thereof, to any person of Chinese, Japanese or other Asiatic race or to any Indian or Negro." [36]

- **Percentages of the Population from 1941 - 1961:** 43.8% British, 30.4% French, 17.7% Western European, 4.9% Eastern European, 1.2% Indigenous, 0.7% Asian, 0.2% Black, and 1.1% not stated. In other words, 91.9% of the population were white. [64]

- **Purge Campaigns of the 1950s and 1960s:** Hundreds of lesbians and gay men were fired from the civil service, the military, and the RCMP on account of their 'sexual misconduct.' Homosexuality was illegal until 1969.

HOW DID MUNICIPAL RECREATION REINFORCE EXCLUSION IN THE NAME OF MARKET-BASED FREEDOM?

Between the late 1880s and the early 1930s, public investments in parks and playgrounds were primarily a local responsibility. During this time, senior level governments had no role in the construction, operation, management, or supervision of municipal recreation programs or facilities. This changed, however, in the 1930s when senior levels of government adopted the ideology of social welfare in response to the devastation caused by the Great Depression.

DEPRESSION-ERA RECREATION PROGRAMS

The first major recreation program to stem from a growing support for welfare programs was ProRec. Introduced in 1934, the ProRec program was meant to improve the health and future employability of unemployed persons, while simultaneously decreasing the political unrest caused by the Great Depression. [65]

The program was a major political win for British Columbia's newly elected Liberal government. The physical activity programming not only distanced the members of the working class from their social and economic woes for a few hours a day, the cost to the provincial government was minimal. [65] Such cost-effective programming made the investment politically appealing to middle- and upper-class voters who were in favour of the Liberal Party's approach to "socialized capitalism." [66]

Socialized capitalism is a form of capitalism that stresses the importance of minimizing social unrest. Supporters of socialized capitalism recognize the need to address issues such as poverty, ill health, and unemployment and therefore support the need for government intervention. This intervention is, however, to occur at an individual not a structural level. That is, rather than making the legislative changes required to ensure all members of society have access to a basic income, housing, and employment, supporters of socialized capitalism reinforce the notion that economic and social progress will be served if the lower classes are provided with the opportunity to acquire the physical, moral, and economic skills needed to succeed within a market-based society. ProRec is an example of a program that reinforced socialized capitalism. Instead of intervening in the systems that created issues such as poverty, ill health and unemployment, this government-run program targeted the behaviours of individuals, so that they would be healthy enough to labour in the future.

ProRec was not the only depression era recreation program that was developed to increase the employability of the working class throughout the 1930s. The *1937 Unemployment and Agricultural Assistance Act* and the *1939 Youth Training Act* were also part of the larger project of socialized capitalism. Both programs provided provinces with financial assistance to train unemployed youth in skills that would increase their capacity for future employment. Physical training and recreational projects were eligible for funding in both Acts. [67, 68]

Once again, the focus on the white, working class is important to note. While racialized, classed, or ableist exclusions were never an explicit part of Depression-era recreation programming, these programs targeted the white working class largely because of the structural conditions created by decades of oppressive and racist state legislation. For example, not only was the pass system still being enforced in the 1930s, residential schools were at their peak during this time. [23] Furthermore, Canada's immigration policies remained explicitly racist and heterosexist until 1976. [69] Add to this the institutionalization of many disabled people [7], or the fact that homosexuality was illegal in Canada until 1969 [27], and it is easy to see how Canadian cities, towns, and institutions (recreation facilities included) were sites where able-bodied, heterosexual, whiteness was re-secured. Indeed, a quick scan of the online article *The Pro-Rec Program: 1934–1953* reinforces this idea. Of the 12 images used in the article, all of the staff and participants appear to fit a white, able-bodied, heterosexual 'family' ideal. [70]

COMMUNITY RECREATION CENTRES

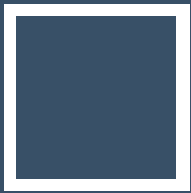
After World War II, the reformatory approach that had been used by playground supervisors and ProRec coordinators was met with a great deal of resistance. [71] During this time, public recreationists provided consistent reminders that the "programs of Hitler and Mussolini were examples of the dire results of using leisure for ulterior purposes" [71]. Their goal was to eliminate the top-down, reformatory approach to recreation programming by positioning recreation as a "symbol of Democracy." [72]

Within this new 'democratic' view, to continue to offer recreation as a social reform was to distort its meaning. Public recreation was now, by definition, something desirable, freely chosen, and self-directed. [71, 72] Those who were considered pathological in relation to social norms (i.e., the unemployed, the gay, the racialized) were now to be dealt with outside of the public recreation system. Social work programs, non-profit organizations, and other state-run facilities were where these 'problematic' or 'degenerate' individuals were to be educated and reformed. Public recreation facilities, on the other hand, were where 'socially responsible citizens' could voluntarily participate in a number of 'appropriate' leisure activities. [73] Thus, for post-World War II municipal recreationists it was the process not the objective that had changed. They were still interested in ensuring the 'constructive' use of leisure, but instead of directly intervening in matters of biological health and national security, public investments were intended to respond to the 'expressed needs' of individual consumers using the market-like forces of demand. [73]

Despite the assumption that the market-like forces of demand would result in programs that served everyone's needs, facility allocation and programming favoured the 'expressed needs' of middle class, white men and boys. [73] In other words, just like most other areas of society, community recreation centres were built around the norm of a white, male breadwinner. [73] Therefore, just as earlier recreational innovations contributed to the growth of a white, capitalist, settler colonial nation, so too did community recreation centres. In this new configuration, however, investments were no longer intended "to control the health and the bodies of the needy classes, to make them more fit for labor and less dangerous to the wealthy classes." [74] Instead, investments in these recreation centres were seen as a way to maximize the health and freedoms of the better off in an effort to build the best possible Canadian citizen. [54]

KEY TAKE AWAY

When read this way, it becomes clear how Depression-era programs and community centres – just like most other social welfare strategies introduced by the Canadian state – did "little in the way of maximizing equality and minimizing poverty, insecurity, and ill health." [54] During this time, public recreationists used a number of market-based logics to reinforce Canada's well-established racialized, classed, and gendered hierarchy. The result was a number of recreation programs and facilities that further contributed to the unequal distribution of (quality of) life chances.



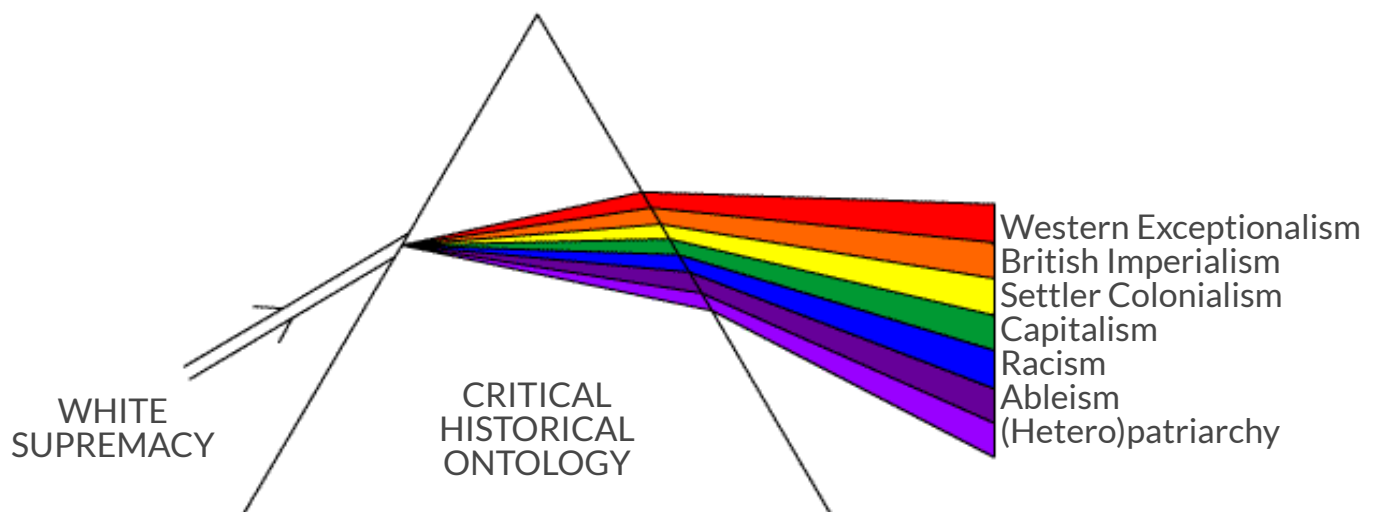
WHAT DO WE DO WITH THIS INFORMATION IN THE PRESENT?

Contemporary recreation literature has an abundance of calls to return to a 'golden age' when recreation was considered a 'public good.' Whether authors of this literature are calling for "outreach to vulnerable people, families, and communities" [76] or for a return to the "values [that] have historically driven municipal recreation" [77], the underlying message is that we need to return to a time when recreation was an activity for ALL Canadians. However, this often-repeated narrative of a more inclusive era in recreation's past is a revisionist and romantic account.

As demonstrated throughout this document, public recreation sites have always been part of the complex economic, political, and social struggles that have rendered settler colonialism, Western exceptionalism, British imperialism, capitalism, racism, ableism, and (hetero)patriarchy active processes in the formation of the Canadian state. Consequently, there are reasons to be critical of how our traditional recreation histories continue to romanticize the sector's past.

From the late 1800s until the late 1970s, playgrounds, swimming pools, ProRec programs, and community recreation centres all reinforced a classed, racialized, ableist, and (hetero)sexist social hierarchy. Therefore, while the neoliberal principles of profitability and efficiency have indeed contributed to the ongoing exclusion in our contemporary big-box recreation facilities, they are only two of the many logics that have given rise to a recreation system that continues to privilege white, middle- to upper-class, able-bodied men and boys. To suggest otherwise, ignores the ways various systems of oppression were reproduced in our earliest municipal recreation settings. It also fails to acknowledge how each of these oppressive and harmful systems are interrelated components of white supremacy (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. The Interrelated Components of White Supremacy



The figure is of the image often used to demonstrate how, when refracted through a prism, white light is separated into its component colors. In this version, however, white light has been replaced with white supremacy, the prism has been replaced with a critical historical ontology, and the component colors represent the various components of white supremacy.

HOW MIGHT WE CREATE MORE EQUITABLE, DIVERSE AND MEANINGFUL LEISURE OPPORTUNITIES?

If we are ever going to dismantle the systems that have sustained, and continue to sustain a public recreation system that centers the health, wealth, and security of middle- to upper- class, white, able-bodied men and boys (and to a less degree women and girls), both scholars and professionals must put aside nostalgic tendencies that position earlier forms of public recreation as sites of 'equal opportunity' and acknowledge the ways public recreation has been, and continues to be, entangled in the various components of white supremacy. Below are three strategies that might act as starting points for creating more equitable, diverse, and meaningful leisure opportunities.

STRATEGY #1 DO THE WORK OF LEARNING AND UNLEARNING

It is not enough for recreation and health professionals to continue to “ensure the provision of supportive physical and social environments” or “develop and implement strategies of inclusion.” [76] As critical health scholar Elizabeth McGibbon has acknowledged, inserting the language of inclusion and equity without interrogating the systems that have created exclusions and inequities “enables policymakers, researchers, educators, and research funding bodies to play the social determinants of health game without a consistent commitment to progressive social change.” [79] The development of more diverse and meaningful leisure opportunities, therefore, requires recreation and health professionals to recognize that a more equitable future does not lie in a quest for inclusion into our existing systems. Rather, recreation and health professionals must aim to fundamentally transform the white supremacist logics and structures upon which our political, economic, and social systems have been, and continue to be, built.

For centuries, racialized people, Indigenous peoples, disabled people, gay people, transgender people, and people living in poverty have been extensively researched and comprehensively pathologized. Using a series of experiments, tests, and studies, those considered to be 'authoritative' agents of knowledge have not only come to know those who have been situated on the margins, they have set out to cure them, fix them, and eradicate their 'abnormalities' using a number of programs, policies, and interventions. Recognizing, however, that the criteria for who can rightly *know* and *govern* those situated on the margins is historically rooted in the logics of white supremacy, it is essential that we begin to problematize the other side of this pathologizing equation. It is only once we reverse this gaze and interrogate the ways Western exceptionalism, settler colonialism, capitalism, ableism, and (hetero)patriarchy have collectively shaped our country's inequitable systems, structures, and institutions that we will be able to re-conceptualize our health-promoting practices in ways that actually reduce existing forms of physical, mental, and spiritual suffering.

The creation of equitable, diverse and meaningful leisure opportunities, therefore, requires recreation and health professionals to recognize that the goal of social justice work is not a finished report but an ongoing process of unlearning. Among other things, white supremacy has created the conditions for a public recreation system that naturalizes, centres, and exalts white, middle- to upper-class, heterosexual, able-bodied men (and to a lesser degree women). In order to advance the contemporary call to “increase inclusion and access to recreation for populations that face constraints to participation” [76], recreation and health professionals must contend with the injurious legacies of white supremacy by engaging in battles against the exploitation, exclusion, discrimination, marginalization, and violence inherent in our Western European systems of knowledge and power. It is only once we have acknowledged that public recreation (and health promotion more broadly) is part of a larger settler colonial project – a project that has created deep divides in access to resources and (quality of) life chances – that we will be able to carefully strategize about how best to improve the health, wealth, and security of those directly impacted by racism, classism, ableism, and (hetero)sexism.

STRATEGY #2 POLITICIZE AND CHOOSE LEISURE

In Western society, we unchoose leisure in hundreds of ways. Whether it is through the glorification of hyper-productivity, a focus on energy expenditure over joy, competition over creativity, or the exploitative labour practices that leave the majority of the population too tired and/or too broke to engage in meaningful leisure experiences, capitalism forces us to both consciously and unconsciously unchoose leisure. Despite this ongoing act of unchoosing, however, leisure remains an important time for rest, resistance, and reconnection. Professionals that intend to improve the quality of life of those directly impacted by racism, classism, ableism, and (hetero)sexism must, therefore, recognize that leisure is not only directly connected to one's quality of life, but that promoting and enabling leisure cannot be separated from a political commitment to social justice.

Leisure (and therefore recreation and health) is political. How, where, when, and why we rest, move, or reconnect with our bodies, minds, and souls is largely determined by the structural conditions that have been produced by settler colonialism, capitalism, racism, ableism, and (hetero)sexism. Finding common cause with political agendas that seek to meaningfully address the harmful and exploitative practices that are (re)produced by these interconnected systems of white supremacy is, therefore, essential to a recreation system that actually allows for “freely chosen participation in physical, social, intellectual, creative, and spiritual pursuits that enhance individual and community wellbeing.” [76]

It is only when recreation and health promotion professionals recognize that leisure is a social justice issue more than it is an individual or behavioural phenomenon, and begin to find common cause with some of the most important political agendas of our time (e.g., Truth and Reconciliation, Black Lives Matter, prison abolition, wealth redistribution, tax reform) that a healthier future will be realized.

STRATEGY #3

POSITION UNIVERSITIES AS LOCATIONS FOR CRITIQUE AND RESISTANCE

Universities have played no small role in the development and maintenance of the white supremacist systems and structures that continue to create deep divides in access to resources and (quality of) life chances. Largely focused on training practitioners capable of developing, implementing, and evaluating programs, health promotion courses (including recreation, leisure, and sport) remain primarily task-focused and largely uncritical in nature. Providing little in regard to what critical health scholar Heather McGibbon has termed the “political economy of health inequities” [79], the majority of health promotion courses teach about the social causes of health inequity (i.e., the social determinants of health) with little mention of how these inequities have been, and continue to be, directly shaped by a political and economic ethos of white supremacy.

Recognizing that universities remain important locations for generating critique and resistance, academics that claim to be committed to the principles of equity, diversity, and social justice must account for the ways various components of white supremacy continue to shape their own research programs. They must also bring into their classrooms the political, theoretical, and ethical frameworks that could take their students beyond “a relatively superficial treatment of health inequity concerns.” [79] In other words, rather than continuing to answer questions such as, *What action could we take?* or *What is to be done?* academic programs in the areas of public and clinical health, recreation, sport, and kinesiology could be redesigned so that one of the primary objectives is to teach students how to uncover what is inherently problematic, difficult, and dangerous in the discourses, practices, and policies that govern our everyday behaviours. [81] The ultimate goal of this restructuring would be to ensure that individuals working in areas of health, recreation, sport, and leisure do so with the understanding that,

The real political task in a society such as ours is to criticise the workings of institutions that appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticise and attack them in such a manner that political violence that has always exercised itself through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight against them. If we want right away to define the profile and the formula of our future society without criticizing all the forms of political power that are exerted in our society, there is a risk that they reconstitute themselves. - Michel Foucault

As the historian Robin Kelley wrote in *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, “Social movements do not simply produce statistics and narratives of oppression; rather, the best ones do what great poetry always does: transport us to another place, compel us to re-live horrors and, more importantly, enable us to imagine a new society.” It is, therefore, my hope that the information in this document encourages you to commit to an undoing. An undoing within the systems and institutions that continue to reinforce white supremacist ways of thinking and acting, as well as an undoing within yourself. It is only when we are able to actively subvert the normalized ways of knowing and experiencing both the world and ourselves that a radical vision for a healthier future will be imagined and realized.



Image of seventeen young, white, women during a ProRec demonstration. They are standing in a long row each in a dance-like pose. All of them are wearing the standardized ProRec uniform, which includes short shorts, a collared top, and gymnastic slippers. City of Vancouver Archives

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