Call for Papers: Essays for Edited Collection

Reconciling Canada: Historical Injustices and the Contemporary Culture of Redress

Contributions are invited to the first essay collection to critically analyze and put into dialogue the diverse cases of apology and reparations in Canada. Official gestures of contrition and commemoration have multiplied and accelerated since the 1988 federal apology for the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II. Some fraught and faltering, some strategic, these gestures reveal the emergence of a complex culture of redress in Canada that is profoundly re-writing official history and re-shaping the contours of national memory. These acts of contrition raise questions about symbolic and performative politics, possibilities and impossibilities of coalitions, hegemonic and counter-hegemonic notions of history and responsibility, public cultures of pain and atonement, connections between identity and injury, and encounters between different cultural logics.

Reconciling Canada will make a number of important critical interventions. First, the collection will analyze reconciliation in the particular national context of Canada, as it is shaped by the relations between redress movements, by national myths and ideologies, and by intersections with global processes. Second, the focus will move beyond the actions of the state and its apparatuses to consider a heterogeneous field of actors: Aboriginal and diasporic constituencies, other advocacy groups for minority rights, churches and religious institutions, educational institutions, the media, and cultural producers, to name a few. Third, the collection will frame the culture of reconciliation as a multi-layered and shifting phenomenon that involves not only the machinery of political and legislative institutions but also the intimate, affective, embodied, and gendered dynamics of injury and ‘healing,’ injustice and reparation. Finally, Reconciling Canada will highlight interdisciplinary methodologies as well as approaches that attend to the work performed by various kinds of texts: official documents, fiction and film narratives, media reportage, representations in visual art, museum exhibits, commemorative installations, etc. The collection will also include appendices that reprint key legislation, archival resistance documents, and the text of official government apologies as well as responses from Aboriginal and diasporic advocacy groups, never before published together.

We invite essays that contribute cutting-edge research into reconciliation in relation to (but not limited to) the following areas:

The State, Citizenship, and Multicultural Civility; Law and Social Justice; Institutions and Discourses of Religion, Spirituality, Health, and Healing; The Intimate Sphere: Bodies, Senses, Affect, Gender, Sexuality, the Family; Diasporic and Aboriginal Redress Movements: Intersections, Coalitions, Conflicts; Local-National-Global Intersections; Reconciliation as Heritage Industry

Please send 750 - 1,000 word proposals in electronic format to Jennifer Henderson (jennifer_henderson@carleton.ca) and Pauline Wakeham (pwakeham@uwo.ca) by November 1st, 2008. Subsequent 5,000 – 8,000 word essays will be due on February 15th, 2009.
Possible questions to consider:

If states can confer recognition, can they also express remorse or show empathy? How has the Canadian state in particular entered the terrain of affect, of interpersonal relations, in new ways?

In what ways might diasporic and Aboriginal redress movements differ constitutionally? What strategic alliances might be formed between diasporic and Aboriginal constituencies seeking redress and in what ways might such coalitions compromise or strengthen claims for reparations?

What is the relation between redress movements and the wider ‘politics of recognition’ in Canada? How does a culture of reconciliation sit alongside a state initiative like the Royal Commission on Reasonable Accommodation in Quebec? How has reconciliation been articulated with ‘tolerance,’ ‘civility,’ and official multiculturalism?

What are some of the tensions between, on the one hand, the legal and political language of individual human rights and, on the other, group demands for recognition, redress, and reconstruction of collective memory? How have these tensions materialized in recent redress cases in Canada?

How might one characterize the relationship between a reconciled Canada and state and corporate agendas of implementing and managing neoliberal social and economic relations? What, for instance, is the relation between the culture of redress and the normative model of entrepreneurial selfhood, of the consumer-citizen, or of the ‘community-minded’ citizen? What role does the resurgence of charity in North America play in the construction of Canada’s culture of reconciliation?

What are the overlaps as well as the spaces of disjuncture between the Canadian state’s project of reconciliation and minoritized constituencies’ demands for redress? What kinds of analytic approaches may facilitate careful analysis of the negotiations between the hegemonic logic of reconciliation and marginalized groups’ conceptualization of redress as a means of challenging state power?

What are the implications of non-monetary forms of remedy and redress for cultural loss such as individual psychological ‘rehabilitation’ and ‘reintegration,’ or community and social ‘development’? What are some of the pre-existent discourses and prior policy ‘problems’ that redress arguments have mobilized?

What does it mean that Canada’s culture of redress has rendered sexual abuse a national-historical issue at the same time that the gender-differentiated nature of experiences of injustice seems to be increasingly overwritten in these debates?

How might we explain the coincidence of the demise of state-supported feminism and women’s programs with the emergence of an age of reconciliation and human rights?
How does Canada’s culture of reconciliation and its associated institutions negotiate the fact that the very projects of international law and settler state nation-building, upon which they stand, were tied to the systematic degradation of Indigenous cultures?

How do some aspects of Indigenous arguments for reparation challenge fundamental legal norms and cultural concepts of a European settler-state like Canada?

How does the culture of reconciliation developing in Canada legitimize as real forms of capital things that were formerly more ephemeral phenomena: dignity, respect, trust, etc? What kind of politics or critique do we have to meet this new order?

To what extent has Canada’s culture of redress become imbricated with the culture of capital through burgeoning heritage industries and the development of museums and cultural sites commemorating historical injustices?

How have apologies from church denominations to residential school survivors influenced the Canadian government’s comparatively belated statement of contrition to Aboriginal peoples?

How does the culture of reconciliation set in motion a particular politics or political economy of truth—procedures for generating and verifying truths, forms of statements, viable subject positions to inhabit, etc? What particular political economy of truth is being constructed by the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

How have redress and reconciliation—and associated issues of individual and intergenerational trauma, cultural loss, history, memory, and political struggle—been taken up in literature, film, and visual art by cultural producers in Canada?

How has the iconography of residential schooling or internment been variously constructed and circulated? Why have these experiences of segregation and incarceration become the key proofs of historical violation for the groups concerned? What are some of the other overdetermined tropes in the representation of injustice for the purposes of redress? How do such representations call upon ideologies of race and gender?

How might the case of the Africville redress movement and its advocacy at municipal and provincial levels shed new light on the implications of soliciting apologies from more localized governmental structures as compared to seeking redress at the federal level?

In what ways might the recent provincial apology from the British Columbia government and the promised forthcoming apology from the federal government for the Komagata Maru case reveal complex allocations of responsibility and competing strategies of damage control between different levels and apparatuses of governance?

Have the Ukrainian-Canadian and Italian-Canadian internment redress movements served to construct these identities as white ethnicities? How might we analyze the relation between the Ukrainian-Canadian and Italian-Canadian calls for reparation in relation to the redress cases of other diasporic communities in Canada that have been stigmatized as visible minorities?