

Afterword: On Recognition, Apology and the ‘Hidden History of the Americas’

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Mi’kmaq Elder Daniel N. Paul’s talk is a passionate, powerful anti-racism lecture. It traverses crucial themes: history, invisibility, recognition, and conscience.

Paul begins by addressing a broad range of historical topics regarding the invasion of the Americas, including what he describes as a persistent denial of colonialism and colonial violence today. He highlights the advancement of pre-contact Native populations, and includes a discussion of issues such as the rich diversity of Native culture and language, and the sophistication of Native political systems, science and food cultivation. Paul addresses issues of race and racism, representation, the Doctrine of Discovery, colonial genocide, and gives a compelling sampling of examples of European maltreatment of Native American peoples over several hundred years. He then turns to Canada, and specifically to the Mi’kmaq experience of British colonisation, outlining a range of cases regarding colonial violence, lack of faith, and deliberate decimation of Native groups. The discussion then leads on to issues of the present, and problems of racism, the (mis)representation of Native peoples and colonial amnesia today. As Paul notes, ‘ongoing visibility remains a problem’, and he draws attention to the pervasive lack of recognition of Native history, colonisation, and continuing indigenous presence, and especially how this plays out in today public space in the maintenance and inscription of a particular historical consciousness. Signs and monuments in the streetscape matter. Daniel concludes by showing how street signs in Bedford and Anapolis, Canada, have served to erase awareness of Native presence and history; conversely, monuments celebrate and reify British

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colonists, such as Lord Cornwallis, whose acts against Native peoples are especially dubious.

Such issues of history, historical bias, recognition, and visibility, of course, go to the heart of late liberal settler democracies, where themes of reconciliation, apology and national healing are now prominent. Only very recently several settler nations have made formal apologies to Aboriginal and Native peoples. In February 2008 Australia's Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, made an official apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who had been removed or stolen from their parents and placed in care or domestic service, often referred to as the 'Stolen Generations'. Indeed, a lack of apology was widely viewed as an obstacle to the reconciliation process in Australia and became a key point of contention.

In June 2008 Canada's Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, made an official apology for the abuse suffered by Aboriginal peoples who had been placed in the Residential School system. Although the U.S. government apologised to native Hawaiians for overthrowing the Kingdom of Hawaii in 1993, a similar apology to Native American was a long time coming. First presented to Congress in 2004, the 'Historic Resolution of Apology to Native Peoples' did not pass. It was then reintroduced in 2009, and President Barack Obama signed the Native American Apology Resolution into law in December 2009. The apology sought to acknowledge 'years of official depredations, ill-conceived policies, and the breaking of covenants by the United States Government regarding Indian Tribes'; and 'apologizes on behalf of the people of the United States to all Native Peoples for the many instances of violence, maltreatment, and neglect inflicted on Native Peoples by citizens of the United States' (4). Points 5, 6 and 7 used the language of reconciliation: 'to move toward a brighter future where all the people of this land live reconciled as brothers and sisters' (5); 'to bring healing to this land by providing a proper foundation for reconciliation between the United States and Indian Tribes' (6); and, 'commends the State governments that have begun reconciliation efforts with recognized Indian Tribes' (7).

The paradox, however, is that even if in many ways the history of colonisation is no longer hidden, official recognition is partial and

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a public discussion of its meaning in the present is barely forthcoming, highlighting the countervailing forces of erasure and recognition that prevail in contemporary settler societies. Despite President Obama's signing of the Native American Apology Resolution into law, to date no official US announcement has been made of this historic signing, no federal or official ceremonies have been held, and many Native Americans remain entirely unaware that the US President has apologised to them. A state apology left unannounced to its subjects, and not articulated in public, only serves to undermine essential principles that are key to any well functioning liberal democracy, that is, ideas of a politics of recognition, trust, and civic engagement, crucial for social transformation and reconciliation. With an unrepresented apology, a hidden history is thus averred.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

*Penny Edmonds is an historian in the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, University of Melbourne. She is the author of *Urbanizing Frontiers: Indigenous Peoples and Settlers in Nineteenth-Century Pacific Rim Cities (2010)* and co-editor with Tracey Banivanua-Mar of *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity (2010)*.*